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## Sen. Hammerstrom's Detroit-Wayne County Community Mental Health legislation passed, sent to governor

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**LANSING** – Legislation addressing concerns surrounding the Detroit-Wayne County Community Mental Health Agency is now headed to the governor's desk. The sponsors are encouraging the governor to sign the legislation immediately, as a delay could put mental health services at risk statewide.

Introduced by state Sens. Beverly S. Hammerstrom and Shirley Johnson, the legislation requires the agency, due to its size and complexity, to convert to an independent authority, a separate legal entity, as defined in the Mental Health Code.

"This is great news for specialty services consumers and their families," said Hammerstrom, R-Temperance, chair of the Senate Health Policy Committee. "Consumers in the DWCCMH are not getting the kind of services they deserve. Throughout the lengthy debate on these bills that has been our primary concern."

Senate Bills 1076 and 1079 amend the state's Mental Health Code. SB 1076 will require the DWCCMH to be established as an authority to receive state support and prohibits city or county employees from serving on the board. SB 1079 makes a technical correction to clarify that if a county agency meets the population requirements in SB 1076 that authority status is no longer voluntary.

These bills will join with SB 591, which amends the Social Welfare Act to require the authority structure for DWCCMH to hold a Medicaid contract with the state.

Hammerstrom and Johnson have shared a concern about the DWCCMH system since their participation in the state's process to obtain the current federal Medicaid waiver.

"We have fought too long and hard for the federal Medicaid waiver to potentially lose it now," said Johnson, R-Troy, chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee. "We have the full support of various consumer groups, including all seven chapters of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill in Wayne County."

If the federal waiver is lost, the entire state community mental health system would be privatized and consumers could be at the mercy of the lowest bidder looking to make a profit.

The two senators also felt compelled to act amid complaints from consumers and providers who have been frustrated and discouraged by the conflicts between the DWCCMH board and the county, DWCCMH's failure to fulfill their state Medicaid contract, and numerous Mental Health Code violations including the lack of a qualified executive director. As recently as two months ago, providers were still not receiving timely payment because of the cumbersome county procurement process.

The DWCCMH, which serves about 75,000 people with mental illnesses and disabilities a year, operates on an annual budget of about \$540 million. More than \$520 million is state and federal Medicaid dollars.

"We strongly urge the governor to sign these bills into law for consumers all across the state of Michigan," Hammerstrom said. "Senator Johnson and I have thoroughly studied this issue and believe we must put politics and personal relationships aside and remove the roadblocks that could jeopardize Michigan's federal waiver. It's much better to act proactively and address these concerns now, before the federal government steps in. There is simply too much at stake to wait any longer."

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